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Axis Supporters Enlisted by U.S. In Postwar Role Albanians Said to Have Been Spies in Balkans

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

Albanian émigré leaders who collaborated with Axis forces in World War II were helped into the United States in the early postwar years in connection with efforts to undermine the Communist Government of Albania, according to State Department documents long classified as secret.

The documents have since been declassified and were obtained from Government archives by Marc Truitt, a Stanford doctoral candidate working on a dissertation on political mobilization of Albanian exiles in the cold war. The papers prompted a reopened investigation by Congress into a possible cover-up involving suspected Nazi war criminals and collaborators given refuge in the United States.

The documents are said to show that although the State Department initially objected to the admitting some of the Albanian émigré leaders because of their "somewhat checkered" backgrounds, intelligence considerations later brought a reversal. Some of the exiles then came to the United States and some played a role in American postwar campaigns against the pro-Soviet Government of Enver Hoxha, the Albanian Communist Party leader. The efforts, which included dropping agents into the Balkans by parachute in the early 1950's to foment revolts, failed and exacerbated Albanian hostility toward the United States.

Cover-Up Is Denied

A State Department official, Ron Neitzke, said he had not seen the documents and could offer no comment. Earlier a State Department spokesman, Alan D. Romberg, denied that there had been any effort at a cover-up in war crimes cases. Thousands of other Albanian war refugees came here in the same period as proper immigrants.

Albania, on the Adriatic between Yugoslavia and Greece, was occupied by the Italian and Nazi armies from 1939 to 1944, when it was liberated by Communist-led partisans. It is among the most politically isolated nations; it has broken bitterly with its former allies, the Soviet Union and China, and only recently signaled an interest in closer relations with Western Europe.

On Dec. 18 the Albanian Prime Minister, Mehmet Shehu, was shot to death or killed himself in Tirana, his capital.

John Loftus, a former war crimes investigator for the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, charged last month on the CBS News program "60 Minutes" that American intelligence agencies had smuggled Byelorussian Nazi collaborators into this country for agitation against the Soviet Union and for espionage in Eastern Europe. Mr. Truitt then made some of his Albanian documentation available to Mr. Loftus and Mr. Loftus passed it on to the General Accounting Office, an investigative arm of Congress. Mr. Loftus said Axis collaborators could not legally enter the United States.

Hiding Files Brings New Inquiry

The G.A.O. said in 1978 that it had found no evidence of any "widespread conspiracy" to obstruct investigations of suspected war criminals here. Then disclosures that some files had been hidden from G.A.O. investigators prompted the House Judiciary Committee to ask its agency last month to reopen its inquiry.

Mr. Truitt obtained an account of a visit by Midhat Frasheri, leader of the Albanian wartime group Balli Kombetar, or National Front, to the American Ambassador in Rome in November 1947. Mr. Frasheri wanted 50 followers admitted to this country to counteract Communist "intrigues" among Albanians. First on the list was Hasan Dosti, Albania's Minister of Justice in the Italian occupation.

Months later, after checking secret biographical files on Mr. Frasheri and his followers, the State Department replied that it "does not believe it would be appropriate" to facilitate the entry of the 50, adding: "It is apparent that the political backgrounds of many of the Albanian exiles in Italy are somewhat checkered and that the presence of these persons in the United States in the circumstances envisioned might sooner or later occasion embarrassment to this Government."

Yet by April 1949 Mr. Dosti was in Washington urging officials to support an Albanian National Committee in Exile. He later became the president of the United States-sponsored National Committee for a Free Albania. He is now 87 years old and lives in Los Angeles.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Dosti dismissed as Communist propaganda assertions that Albanian war criminals had come to the United States, adding that he fought the Germans and the Germans killed members of his family. Mr. Frasheri got into the United States in 1949 with the help of Robert Joyce, a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff.

"In the National Interests"

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Another Xhafer D. States. In memorandum Minister of the Interior in the Nazi occupation "who is held responsible by large numbers of Albanians for the Tirana massacres of Feb. 4, 1944, and other excesses committed by the Gestapo in collaboration with the Albanian gendarmerie." He died in Paio Alto, Calif., in 1978. A wartime leader, Abas Kupi, who wanted the ousted King Zog restored to the Albanian throne, died in Freeport, L.I., in 1976.

The Free Albania committee was given a voice in American policy, according to a 1949 account of a meeting between Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary.

"Bevin," Mr. Acheson is quoted as saying, "asked whether we would basically agree that we try to bring down the Hoxha Government when the occasion arises? I said yes, but if this were precipitated now the Greeks and Yugoslavs might touch off serious trouble. Bevin agreed that we have to be careful or Russia will intervene. He asked what government would replace Hoxha if he is thrown out? Are there any kings around that could be put in?"

Operations by the parachuted agents in Albania and Soviet bloc nations for American and British intelligence were compromised by the British-Soviet double agent Kim Philby. Agents who were caught were shot.

One American intelligence agent planning such efforts was Michael Burke, later president of the New York Yankees and a CBS corporate executive. In an interview in March in Augrim, Ireland, where he is working on his autobiography, Mr. Burke said that in the late 1940's "I was asked by the C.I.A. if I would try to create a revolution in Albania."

"Actually," he said, "it was to be a clinical case for the United States Government and the question was: Is it possible in peacetime to bring down a Communist Government without overt military intervention? It was a trial case and I worked at it about a year and a half and concluded in the end it was not possible to do without overt air and military support from England and the United States, or somewhere. You couldn't do it with just locals."

Mr. Truitt said he was seeking more documents, particularly a 1949 State Department booklet on identities and backgrounds of the Albanian exiles. He said he asked the C.I.A. two years ago for every retrievable document on Albania between 1944 and 1956, to be told there were only three and one remained.